Editorial:

Reshaping Retail and Marketing in a Disrupted Global Economy

Prof MC Cant

Manager Retail and Marketing Review
Professor: Department of Marketing and Retail Management

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The global retail and marketing environment continues to undergo profound transformation, driven by technological innovation, changing consumer expectations, geopolitical uncertainty, and the ongoing restructuring of international supply chains. As we present this latest edition of *Retail and Marketing Review*, it is evident that the sector is experiencing one of the most significant periods of change since the advent of digital commerce. For both scholars and practitioners, understanding the forces reshaping retailing and marketing has become increasingly important in a world characterised by complexity, disruption, and accelerated innovation.

Across international markets, retailers continue to embrace technological advancements that are fundamentally altering business models and consumer engagement strategies. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, predictive analytics, automation, and advanced customer relationship management systems are increasingly being integrated into retail operations. The continued evolution of omnichannel retailing has blurred the traditional boundaries between physical and digital commerce, enabling consumers to interact seamlessly with brands across multiple platforms. Retailers are investing heavily in data-driven decision-making, personalised marketing initiatives, and enhanced customer experiences in an effort to maintain competitiveness in an increasingly demanding marketplace.

Notwithstanding these advances, the global retail sector continues to face significant challenges. Economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, changing consumer spending patterns, and geopolitical instability have created an environment in which many retailers are struggling to maintain profitability and market share. In several major economies, well-established retail organisations have been forced to restructure, downsize, or cease operations altogether. In recent years, notable examples have included the collapse of Bed Bath & Beyond in the United States, the continuing challenges experienced by department store chains such as Macy's, and the financial difficulties encountered by several European retail groups facing declining consumer demand and rising operating costs. The failure of numerous e-commerce start-ups that expanded aggressively during the pandemic years has further illustrated the importance of sustainable growth strategies and prudent financial management.

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Of particular concern has been the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and its implications for global trade and commerce. The continuing instability in the region has disrupted critical maritime trade routes, particularly through the Red Sea and surrounding shipping corridors that connect Europe, Asia, and Africa. Attacks on commercial shipping vessels and the resulting rerouting of maritime traffic around the Cape of Good Hope have increased transportation costs, extended delivery times, and created significant uncertainty for international supply chains. These developments have had far-reaching consequences for retailers, manufacturers, and logistics providers worldwide, contributing to higher freight costs, inventory challenges, and increased pressure on already constrained supply networks.

The impact of these disruptions has reinforced the growing recognition that traditional supply chain models require fundamental reconsideration. For decades, many organisations pursued highly efficient "just-in-time" inventory systems designed to minimise costs and reduce stockholding requirements. However, recent global events—including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, and regional conflicts—have exposed the vulnerabilities inherent in highly concentrated and globally dispersed supply networks. Consequently, many organisations are now prioritising resilience alongside efficiency in the design of their logistics and supply chain strategies.

One of the most significant developments in contemporary retailing has therefore been the redesign of the logistics value chain. Increasingly, companies are adopting diversified sourcing strategies, regional manufacturing networks, and nearshoring initiatives to reduce dependence on single suppliers or geographic regions. Major multinational corporations such as Apple have accelerated the diversification of manufacturing activities beyond China into countries including India and Vietnam. Similarly, Walmart has expanded investments in supply chain digitisation and automation, while Amazon continues to deploy advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics throughout its global fulfilment network. These initiatives are intended not only to improve operational efficiency but also to enhance supply chain resilience and responsiveness in the face of future disruptions.

Innovative logistics solutions are also reshaping the competitive landscape. Amazon's highly automated fulfilment centres, supported by thousands of autonomous mobile robots, have significantly enhanced order processing efficiency and delivery performance. Walmart has implemented advanced inventory visibility systems and automated distribution centres that enable faster replenishment and improved inventory accuracy. DHL has expanded its use of digital twins and predictive analytics to optimise transportation networks, while Maersk has invested heavily in integrated end-to-end logistics solutions that provide customers with enhanced visibility across the supply chain. In addition, companies such as Zara, through its parent company Inditex, continue to demonstrate the strategic value of agile supply chains by maintaining a significant proportion of production close to key consumer markets, enabling rapid response to changing fashion trends and consumer preferences.

Within the South African context, these global developments present both challenges and opportunities. Local retailers continue to contend with infrastructure constraints, logistics inefficiencies, energy security concerns, currency volatility, and subdued economic growth. Nevertheless, the sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Retailers are increasingly investing in digital platforms, data analytics, last-mile delivery solutions, and customer-centric service innovations. The growth of e-commerce, coupled with ongoing investments in supply chain optimisation and technology adoption, suggests that South African retailers are actively positioning themselves to compete in a rapidly evolving global marketplace.

At the same time, the country's strategic location along major international shipping routes has assumed renewed significance as global trade patterns adjust to geopolitical developments. The increased movement of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope has highlighted both the opportunities and challenges associated with South Africa's logistics

infrastructure. Enhancing port efficiency, transportation networks, and supply chain capabilities will remain critical if the country is to fully capitalise on these emerging opportunities.

The articles presented in this edition reflect the breadth and diversity of contemporary retail and marketing scholarship. They address issues ranging from consumer behaviour and digital transformation to supply chain management, sustainability, innovation, and strategic marketing. Collectively, these contributions advance our understanding of the complex forces shaping modern commerce and provide valuable insights for academics, policymakers, and industry practitioners alike.

As the retail and marketing disciplines continue to evolve in response to unprecedented global change, rigorous scholarly inquiry remains essential. Through the generation and dissemination of new knowledge, academic research can contribute meaningfully to the development of more resilient, innovative, and sustainable business practices. It is our hope that the research featured in this issue will stimulate critical discussion, inspire future investigation, and support evidence-based decision-making across the retail and marketing sectors.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the authors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial Board whose commitment to academic excellence and scholarly integrity has made this publication possible. Their contributions continue to strengthen the quality and relevance of *Retail and Marketing Review* as a platform for advancing knowledge and fostering meaningful engagement between academia and industry.

Professor Michael Colin Cant
Manager
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